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CORRESPONDENCE.

A REJOINDER.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES.

SIRS:—Early last year there appeared in the London *Academy*, some strictures by me, under the heading of "The American Dialect." As I have only just learned, they were unadverted on, some time ago, by a contributor to your journal, Mr. R. O. Williams. The whole that my depreciator has to say may be summed up in a single question and the answer to it. In substance asking whether my philology is not egregiously amiss, he seems to resolve the point conclusively. If his representations could bear scrutinizing, protest against his decision would be futile. But what if his alleged facts have no other ground than fiction, in all its sweet simplicity?

My paper mentioned above, has for its subject, the deterioration of the English tongue in the United States. The slangy jargon of ordinary conversation and of most newspapers is there had in view only subordinately, while I take particular account of the diction which is found in thousands of our books. Inevitably we have a dialect. But a dialect equally with a language, has its prescriptions; and why should so many of us consent to be democratic, mobocratic, and even anarchic, linguistically? Can the assertion be traversed, that ninety and nine in every hundred of us take little pains to be otherwise? By nobody who is capable of judging can it be gainsaid, and it behoves a wise patriot to acknowledge and to lament, that the phraseology of nearly all our recent popular authors is tarnished with vulgarisms, imported and indigenous, at which a cultivated taste cannot but revolt. Nor is this the sole uncouth trait that sullies the written style of the great body of our fellow-countrymen. Conspicuous, with them, almost in like degree, are slovenliness, want of lucidity, breach of established idiom, faultily grammar, and needless Americanism, general or sectional. Of these offences against the aesthetics of literary composition they are seen, moreover, to show themselves, year by year, increasingly regardless. That Americanism would probably come to designate appropriately the tissue of rhetorical defects

which has been partially analysed was to be reckoned on. Shall this stigma be allowed to become impressed ineffaceable? More or less to Americanize, that is, to give in to Americanism, specialties indistinguishable from provincialism, can now hardly be helped; but, to most, at the cost of proper care, Americanism is largely avoidable.

My article in the *Academy* eminently consults the interests of our people. Right notions, to be instilled most effectively, must be instilled in childhood. For a long time it has been a source of regret to me that our school-books have, as a rule, left much to desire with respect to their English. One of these its subject matter passed over, I undertook, in my article, to criticize. If I selected Mr. Edward Eggleston's 'First Book in [of] American History,' my reasons for so doing were, that it was fresh from the press, and that, owing to the author's popularity there was every likelihood of its being widely adopted by teachers. I had noticed, too, that a writer in so influential a periodical as the *Educational Review*, ignoring its style, had roundly characterized it as "admirable."

The demand that it should have conformed, in its language, to the standard of the English of England is nowhere made in my observations. I admitted, by the clearest implication, that it might without any reproach, be marked, to some slight extent, by Americanism; and its Americanisms I glanced at only incidentally, as a subject for discussion. In order to foreclose possibility of misapprehension, I studiously premised that its feature arranged by me in its "corruptness of dialect," with which, in England, analogizes what chiefly constitutes that blemish, corruptness of English. Just before speaking of "corruptness of dialect," I say: "Genuine English is no longer practically our portion; and our teaching it for everyday purposes would be an anachronism. Instances are most abundant in which we have, instead of its words and phrases, substitutes for them. Of the difference in quality between such of these substitutes as are tolerable, and such as should be pronounced intolerable, not many of us, however, have other than a hazy conception." To nothing else could I, of course, refer, by "substi-

tutes," "tolerable" and "intolerable," than justifiable innovations, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, solecisms, gratuitous departures from right English, whether home-bred or international. My censure of Mr. Eggleston was for outraging in an elementary manual, of all places, our special variety of English, as presented in a reasonably acceptable form; and this he assuredly does in "he studied much *about* geography," in "a piece of *twine string*," and in a host of other instances.

From beginning to end, my article is of a rigidly uniform tenor. By way of illustrating Mr. Eggleston's proneness to solecism, I give two groups of quotations from him. The first group exemplifies, as I put it, "misuses of particles and the like." It contains twenty-one items. These items given, I go on to say: "Several of the aberrancies indicated in them are, it is true, of almost universal currency in the United States; but yet as having no good warrant in reason, and as being shunned by our most approved stylists, they ought, doubtless, to be discouraged." Not one of those aberrancies have I even hinted to be an Americanism. We have, in them, well nigh one and all, simply solecisms which might be committed, here and there, by Englishmen.

Again, prefacing a second and longer group of quotations, I speak of it as containing "miscellaneous modes of speech which, on one score or another, Mr. Eggleston would have done well to avoid." And subjoined to those quotations is the remark: "most of the vulgarisms and sectionalisms, with other deviations from the best American English exhibited in the phrases instanced above, are such that no comment on them can be necessary for any one whose acquaintance with our dialect deserves to be accounted critical."

By Americanism, in the sense of the word noted higher up, the American dialect, in its more usual form, that of debasement, the form of it employed by Mr. Eggleston, is, unhappily, described aright. But even in that form of it, Americanisms, strictly so-called, are comparatively infrequent. On these as I take the denomination, and as all the world takes it, I have touched very slightly, in dealing with Mr. Eggleston. He has, certainly, not a few,

of the exceptional class, as I obliquely intimated by saying that "it would be idle to contend that his Americanisms have not in large share the countenance of all our later writers of any conspicuous note, a mere handful of them, the very choicest, omitted from account." And even these Americanize in some measure. Indeed, if they did otherwise, in addition to perplexing most of their readers, they would occasionally be chargeable, not unfairly, with affectation. Yet only three, out of all Mr. Eggleston's Americanisms, the archaic "that river *empties* into the Mississippi," the sectionalism "a wig or *suit* of false hair," and "to work as a *hired man*," have I particularized. It is for his prevailing plebeianism and lawlessness of expression that I think him blamable. Had he reached the level of creditable American English, my critique would never have been written. To return to the paragraph just reproduced, more than is there said I should have spared to say, regarding his Americanisms, except for the three among them which I picked out for annotation.

But what, at the hands of Mr. Williams, have all my painstaking guardedness and scrupulous exactness in defining my scheme of criticism stood me in stead? Not one of the passages which I have cited from myself in the two paragraphs preceding the last, nor the import of any of them, has he so much as alluded to. He perfectly well foresaw that the production of them would be suicidal. So far, by garbling me, he indulges in uncandid suppression of the truth. But he goes further than this. He as good as asserts that I consider all the objectionable locutions which I extract from Mr. Eggleston's pages to be Americanisms; for, since in a critical passage, and there only, he encloses that term in double commas, with the design, unquestionably, in keeping with his paper throughout, to have it understood that I apply it to those locutions. And what follows from this device? Nothing less than this, that he virtually charges me with rating as Americanisms the expressions, taken from Mr. Eggleston, "that *don't* matter" and "Benjamin Harrison just took him up in his arms, and *sat* him down in the chair," for example. Now, an American stripling of fifteen, if an oblivious block-head, may require to be told that such samples

of bad grammar are of common occurrence in novels, tales, and what not, new and old, that come to us from England; and I am inferentially assigned an equality with the poor creature. This equality determined, how, pray, in venturing to discuss English, could I be anything better than a passed-master in charlatanry? My critic assumes that I class as an Americanism any incorrect or slipshod English into which our compatriots trespass. Otherwise, he must theorize that, as a reader, I labour under a unique description of intermittent philological blindness; that I possess the faculty of discerning errors, when the book before me is American, but wholly lose that faculty, when the book is English.

I now resume my examination of the method by which Mr. Williams would make out that what I impeach in Mr. Eggleston's book is solely its Americanisms. In the opening of his "Not so very American," he premises that, in my *Academy* article, "there is a recognition of two kinds of Americanisms, 'tolerable' and 'intolerable.' The former are noticed only by allusions here and there; the latter are commented on at some length, and illustrated by very numerous quotations taken from an American schoolbook. As it is my purpose to show that many of the locutions supposed by Dr. Hall to be Americanisms are not peculiarly American, I will first make the fact evident that they were cited as such by Dr. Hall."

One of his two quotations from me, "Genuine English," etc., then introduced, in reliance on which he professes to bring home to me what amounts to portentous folly, I have transcribed some way back. It is not, as has been seen, merely Americanisms, but Americanisms and very much besides, that I there divide into tolerable and intolerable; the word Americanisms I cautiously avoided using. There goes far more than Americanisms to make up the medley which I call "the American dialect." Our popular deviations from good British English, not in part, but in all I designedly and expressly pointed to by my wording; and those deviations, as, by laying Mr. Eggleston's little book under contribution, I proceeded to demonstrate, fall under several categories.

The only other quotation from me which is produced by Mr. Williams consists of the para-

graph, "It would be idle," etc., likewise transcribed above, with the paragraph immediately succeeding it; the two presumably in order to the perversion of my meaning, being run into one.

Those paragraphs occur towards the close of my paper. In the first of them, I reflect cursorily on the Americanisms scattered through the pages of Mr. Eggleston, and so take leave of him. The second of them, a general reclamation against the American dialect in its ordinary lawless form, and substantially a repetition of the beginning of my paper, where I speak of "substitutes," "tolerable" and "intolerable," is as follows:

"In so saying, I of course imply that our linguistic innovations, some of which have established themselves ineradicably, and are, in fact, indispensable, are by no means to be condemned without exception. At present, however, without undertaking the defence of such of them as are defensible, I limit myself to deprecating those which are indefensible, either as being entirely gratuitous or on other grounds equally valid. Of innovations of this description, which so commonly disfigure American English, the number, I repeat, is very great. Manifestly, then, their diffusion and their constant increase call for grave consideration. That a duty devolves on us, in connection with them, is what I would suggest by this slight paper."

How, I would now ask, could I have delivered myself more unmistakably than I have done in my *Academy* article. I should have stultified myself by heading that article "Americanisms." Very unimportant, I say again, are Americanisms, as an ingredient of the vulgar American dialect, in comparison with, for example, its unidiomatic, markedly inferior, or positively spurious English. Americanisms, alone, however, Mr. Williams unjustly represents me as concerned with. He would have it believed that I see them in Mr. Eggleston's "way to get *around* Africa," "a *school taught* by a man named Hobby," "if he wanted *to*, he could not," "a *triumphant* procession," "he did not *use* beer," "if you send that, . . . I *will* be convinced," and so on to weariness. As regards "*help . . . finish* the war," and "he *did not have* much appetite," he represents

that I take them to be Americanisms, though these words of mine, which he had before him, but to which he chose to shut his eyes, by plain construction contradict his averment: "*Help finish* instead of *help to finish*, be it as it may elsewhere, is, in this country exclusively confined to the discourse of plebeians. And not a shade more reputable, here in Great Britain, and barely more endurable than *does not be*, etc., and *does not have*, *did not have*, etc., though their pretensions to respectability are observably different in the United States." "I *did not have* them" is met with even in Cardinal Newman, to be sure; but for all that, its proletarianism is beyond denial.

The aim of Mr. Williams is to lay at my door that for which, if he made good his contention, I should justly be an object of contemptuous derision. On his faith, I have been duped by conceit into imagining myself able to point out the discrepancies of the English of America from that of England, and yet have still to acquire the very elements of the information essential for such an undertaking. After expending page after page, with intent to fasten on me the imputation of crass ignorance and utter incompetence as a philologist, he thinks fit to say, however, that my "knowledge of the differences between British [English] and American English is incomparably greater than that of anybody else." Inconsistency he would, I suppose, disavow; and I have no disposition to tax him with it. He is, of course, ironical. Let it be hoped that practice will by and by impart to his essays in irony a higher finish and a keener edge than have hitherto distinguished them.

Should any curious person impartially go through my "American Dialect" and Mr. William's "Not so very American," I am entirely confident of his conclusion. It would be summarily, that my critic's citations, from English books, of passages parallel to those which I have given from Mr. Eggleston, in no way whatever affect my argument; that he has not detected me in a single error; and that his indictment of me for fatuity recoils on himself.

FITZEDWARD HALL.

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PARLER FRANÇAIS COMME UNE VACHE ESPAGNOLE.

TO THE EDITORS OF MOD. LANG. NOTES.

SIRS:—It seems to be generally understood that in the familiar "parler français comme une vache espagnole," *vache* stands for *Basque* by popular etymology. The addition of the adjective seeming strange, Littré (s.v. *vache*) tries to explain: "Comme il y a des Basques en Espagne et d'autres en France, on a dit d'abord: Parler français comme un Basque espagnol ou comme une Basque espagnole." Even if we have to see *Basque* in *vache*, I do not think that the adjective was originally the attribute of the subst., but that we have to understand the phrase as follows: "Il parle français comme un Basque (*parle*) espagnol." We here have a comparison between two different languages, the same we have in the interpretation of this proverbial saying, I would prefer. Though Fass as well as Andresen follow Littré, I believe *vache* was not introduced into it by "une corruption." The phrase might originally have run like this: "Il parle français comme une vache espagnol," that is to say, "*espagnol*" was originally the object of a verb *parle*, just as *français* is of *parle*. Later on, this was misunderstood, it seemed to be the attribute of *vache*, and the *e* as sign of the feminine of the adjective, was added. For the word *espagnol* in this phrase, compare the use of *spanisch* in many German expressions; as, "es kommt mir etwas spanisch vor; es klingt einem etwas spanisch; es wird einem spanisch im Kopfe" (Sanders). That the cow is often cited in proverbs and proverbial sayings, a glance at one of the dictionaries of proverbs shows. Grimm (p. 2548) gives "so viel verstehn von etwas als die Kuh vom Kalender," Wander in his rich collection (s.v. Kuh, 601) has: "Man würde eher einer Kuh spinnen lehren." But more than all this the following quotations must interest us, as they seem to contain a translation of the original French saying and to be decisive evidence of the explanation I have given. Wander I, 1103 has; "He sprekt fransch wie de Kuh spansch," as spoken at Meurs, quite corresponding to "Hä sprich frânsch wie de Koh spânsch," quoted from a letter by Andresen, note on p. 49. In Dutch we see the same phrase, compare Wander I, 1103: "Hij kent Fransch als eene Koe Spaansch." On page 741 of the fourth volume, he gives it in Modern High German, though a little different: "Er spricht davon französisch wie eine Kuh spanisch."

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